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A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF SPEECH LEVEL SINGING AND
TRADITIONAL VOCAL TRAINING IN THE UNITED STATES

by
Josef William McClellan

A Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
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ABSTRACT

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American voice teacher Seth Riggs has spent the bulk of his career developing and marketing a technique for singing called *Speech Level Singing* (SLS). It is a technique based on keeping the singing voice as closely related to the speaking voice as possible. His claim is that one can use this technique to successfully sing any style of music, from opera to the newest pop/rock song. Traditionally in the United States most voice teachers, whether in a private studio or affiliated with a college or conservatory, teach a technique based on the traditional classical music of Western Europe. The goal of this document is to compare the philosophies and practices of Riggs's training (for both his students and the teachers that get certified to teach SLS) to the philosophies and practices of more traditional teachers in the United States. The writings in Seth Riggs's book on vocal technique, *Singing for the Stars*, are compared to those of four distinguished authors on the subject of vocal pedagogy: Richard Miller, Oren Brown, Jerome Hines, and David Jones. Some authors help to back up Riggs's beliefs on healthy singing while others vehemently disagree with Riggs's approach.

In addition to comparing literature, seven singers who have studied both classical singing and SLS were interviewed via an emailed questionnaire. The insight of singers who have studied both techniques is very beneficial for understanding how the two either compliment or contradict each other.

The art of singing is so subjective that it is nearly impossible to come up with a concrete conclusion as to which approach to singing is best. However, with the amount

of influence SLS (and other speech related approaches to singing) is currently having with the younger generation of American singers, a greater understanding of its merits and drawbacks should be the goal of any teacher of singing.

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Introduction:

“Sing like you speak.” That statement seems so simple. Many singers and teachers have admitted that to some degree this advice is correct. In essence, singing is an extension of our speaking voice, in that we use the same equipment to do both. However, if it is that simple, why do so many students and professionals work so hard to obtain proper vocal technique? If one can simply sing as he or she speaks, then what is the point of having a voice teacher, or for that matter, attending a college or conservatory? Shouldn’t voice students just consult a speech therapist and be done with it? It is somewhat drastic, of course, to assume one can learn to sing simply by addressing problems with the speaking voice. The notion of simply singing as one speaks could lead to problems for students or even a more established artist.

Somewhat building on the premise of “sing like you speak,” American vocal coach Seth Riggs has developed and, even more so, marketed the technique of singing with one’s larynx in the same position as when one is speaking. Thus the technique and business are called Speech Level Singing (SLS). There are several interesting aspects to SLS: the technique, its application, the business model, who can teach it, who benefits from it, who is against it, etc. In this document, the various aspects of SLS will be analyzed and compared to traditional vocal pedagogy in the United States in the 20th and early 21st centuries: how Riggs developed it; why he developed it; and if it is truly the next level in our understanding of how to use the vocal instrument.

Although there are plenty of international approaches to vocal pedagogy (German School, French School, Italian School, and the English School), the focus of this document will be on the American aspects of vocal training, since the development of

SLS and its subsequent marketing took place initially in the U.S. Only in the last few years has it become an international brand/network. Riggs's target clientele is obviously pop/musical theater singers; however, there are a few classical artists who credit Riggs's SLS for their success as singers¹.

The objective of this study is neither to endorse nor discredit SLS, but to analyze its aspects and compare it to common studio practices in colleges, conservatories, and private studios in the United States. From the research already done for this thesis, it can be gleaned that SLS has some similarities to and some stark differences from the popular pedagogical practices of noted teachers and authors such as Richard Miller, Oren Brown, David Jones, and Jerome Hines. However, the largest distinction from his colleagues in the field of vocal pedagogy is not so much Riggs' technique itself, but the marketing of it and the development of its teachers.

Thanks in part to the television show *American Idol*, an impressive list of popular endorsements, summer camps, and just enough classical endorsements to legitimize the method, SLS has become an international empire. A tour of the SLS website (www.speechlevelsinging.com) will display the broad reaching, money making opportunities for an SLS franchise. Later in this paper, the process of teacher certification and the board of pedagogues that govern SLS will be discussed. From the vantage point of a performer or a teacher, SLS is impressive as a career and business model. What it does for its students and the art of singing and vocal pedagogy may turn out to be another matter.

¹ Seth Riggs, *Singing for the Stars: A Complete Program for Training Your Voice* (USA: Alfred Publishing Co., Inc, 2008), 40-41.

Chapter 1: Seth Riggs: The Man

Seth Riggs's biography fills the first three pages of his book on vocal technique, *Singing for the Stars (SFTS)*. His outside-the-box approach and mindset for how things should work is intriguing in the realm of music business. It is evident that Riggs holds some disdain for the status quo of what is considered legitimate singing technique and repertoire within the "Ivory Halls" of what Riggs refers to as the teaching establishment.¹

Seth Riggs began his career as a boy soprano in Washington D.C. at the Washington National Cathedral, singing music by such composers as Johann Sebastian Bach and George Frideric Handel. His later vocal study included lessons with an impressive list of teachers and singers: John Charles Thomas, Robert Weede, famous tenor Tito Schipa, Helge Roesenwanger, and Keith Davis. Among his repertoire coaches were Pierre Bernac, Martial Singher, Leo Taubman, Charles Wadsworth, John Brownlee, Hans Heintz, and Louis Graveure. As a professional performer, he spent ten years on Broadway, and for six years he was a guest artist with the New York City Opera. In the midst of his singing career, he found a love for teaching and helping his colleagues to sing more efficiently. In his biography, he notes that his approach to "bridge balancing" (how a singer handles his or her register changes or *passaggio* points) made singing easier for his fellow artists than the conventional techniques they were being taught by their teachers.² According to this account, that is what led Riggs into his teaching career.

Successful results of his teaching lead other singers to leave their teachers to study with Riggs. He tried to convince his fellow teachers of the merits of his unconventional teaching methods, but his efforts were met with resistance.

¹ Riggs, 10.

² Riggs, 10.

Unconventional methods, no matter how well they worked, were frowned upon by the teaching establishment. As a result, he was kicked out of the National Association of Teachers of Singing (N.A.T.S.), as well as relieved from his duties at the colleges where he taught. Obviously rejected by the establishment, Riggs headed to the West Coast, where he began teaching in Los Angeles to a much different clientele.

The accomplishments of his students are impressive to say the least: four National Metropolitan Opera Winners, Chicago's WGN Award, Rockefeller Foundation Grants, The Frank Sinatra Award, Young Musicians Foundation Award, Salzburg Mozart Festival Award, National Opera Award, and Fulbright Grants and Rotary Scholarships to Europe.

According to *SFTS*, Seth Riggs' opera students have performed in most of the major opera houses in the world: Munich, Hamburg, Frankfurt, Salzburg, Vienna Staatsoper, La Scala, Covent Garden, and the New York Metropolitan Opera.

According to *SFTS*, Riggs draws over 1,000 new voice students every year with little to no advertising (which is not as true now, since the advent of the internet, *American Idol*, and youtube.com). Of his students, 40 % are in opera, while 60 % perform a mixture of popular styles and musical theater.

Along with teaching, Riggs conducts master classes at colleges and universities throughout the United States and Canada. He frequently assists and consults with physicians who specialize in functional disorders of the human voice and vocal therapy.

Seth Riggs's list of celebrity students, Broadway and movie affiliations is overwhelming, if nothing else (figure 1). Throughout the pages of *SFTS*, there are testimonials from iconic singers and actors alike, boasting of great technique attributed to

SLS. However, when listening to recordings and live performances of some of these artists, little evidence of a trained vocal production is exhibited (e.g. the strained vocal production of Michael Jackson). This doesn't necessarily discredit Riggs or his methods. Some of these performers were performing for decades before working with him. Demanding schedules and multiple performances do not usually lend themselves to a healthy vocal regimen. However, lack of a healthy tone production cannot be totally ignored. If a teacher is going to take credit for a student's success as a Grammy winner, then he must also take some responsibility for that same student's vocal faults.

Boasting of 40 Grammy winners means very little in terms of vocal stability. Rappers win Grammy Awards. Can a rap artist be held to the equal vocal status of an accomplished classical artist? Perhaps the two cannot be compared. However, simply being famous does not mean an artist has achieved exceptional vocal technique. Even opera itself is full of legendary artists who have/had reputations for deplorable vocal technique (Giuseppe di Stefano, Maria Callas). Throughout *SFTS*, commercial success is somewhat equated to vocal success, but the two can be mutually exclusive. That being said, before we can go on to compare SLS to more conventional methods, it is important to have a quick overview of what singing in this manner entails.

Solo Artists

Bryan Adams
Julie Andrews
Priscilla Bakersville
Anne Barcroft
Kim Basinger
Michael Bolton
Carol Burnett
Nicolas Cage
David Cassidy

Groups

Kiss
Wallflowers
Earth, Wind, & Fire
Eurythmics
Chicago
Bob Dylan
Fleetwood Mac
Supremes
Shalimar

Solo Artists

Ray Charles
Cher
Natalie Cole
Tom Cruise
MacCauley Culkin
Patty Duke
Sandy Duncan
Jane Fonda
Peter Gallagher
Marla Gibbs
Whoopi Goldberg
Melanie Griffith
Robert Guillaume
Gene Hackman
Goldie Hawn
Thomas Hayward
Janet Jackson
La Toya Jackson
Michael Jackson
Randy Jackson
Al Jarreau
Waylon Jennings
Nicole Kidman
Val Kilmer
Jennifer Lopez
Madonna
Ann-Margaret
Steve Martin
Shirley MacLaine
Bette Midler
Liza Minelli
Eddie Murphy
Jan Murray
Aaron Neville
Olivia Newton-John
Sinead O'Connor
Ozzy Osbourne
Bernadette Peters
Prince
Bonnie Rait
Lionel Ritchie
Tiffany
Luther Vandross
Ben Vereen

Groups

Toto
Red Hot Chili Peppers
Aerosmith
Mozart
Brownstone
All-4-One
For Real
As Yet

Broadway Shows

The Sound of Music
Gone with the Wind
Gigi
Oliver
The King and I
Fiddler on the Roof
Macbeth
Camelot
The Wiz
Tempest
Evita
Guys and Dolls
Les Miserables
Pirates of Penzance
Can Can
Chorus Line
Royal Opera
The Scarlet Pimpernel

Movies

New York, New York
Sweet Charity
Cool World
Rhinestone Cowboy
Newsies
Songwriter
Black Sabbath
Tommy
Color Purple
The Doors
Roadhouse
Dick Tracy
Sister Act
Boys on the Side

Solo Artists

Eduardo Villa
James Wagner
Raquel Welch
Paul Williams
Stevie Wonder

Movies

The Lion King

Figure 1: Abbreviated List of Students and Affiliations

Seth Riggs, *Singing for the Stars: A Complete Program for Training Your Voice* (USA: Alfred Publishing Co., Inc, 2008), 88-90.

SLS: The Technique

Most singing techniques or singing schools of thought have certain hallmarks that are emphasized. For example, the Nordic/German school of singing usually deals with heavy vowel modification (or *Deckung* in German), focus on the lower abdominal and lumbar muscles as the basis of breath support, and a distaste for forward resonance placement.³ SLS also has its hallmark. The mantra that Riggs repeats often is for everyone to sing in their speech level position. Speech level is basically a stable laryngeal position. The position considered to be optimal is a median position, neither depressed nor raised. This by no means contradicts other traditional vocal techniques. The commonly taught Italian *bel canto* approach, which many American pedagogues claim to teach, also endorses a stable laryngeal position. However, laryngeal position is not usually billed as such a cure-all for vocal faults as it is in *SLS*. There is very little focus on breathing or breath support. Riggs believes that the subject of breathing has been overemphasized in the teaching of singing.⁴ He is not necessarily alone in this thought, as will be touched upon later in this document. He walks his readers through a

³ Richard Miller, *National Schools of Singing: English, French, German, and Italian Techniques of Singing Revisited* (Oxford: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1997) 21, 67-68, 134-135.

⁴ Riggs, 78.

brief anatomy lesson on the function of breathing for singing, but as a technical focus (cause), it is not emphasized. Similarly, resonance is defined but not considered a point to be overly dwelt upon. It is more a result of singing at speech level. In fact most characteristics of traditional singing techniques are considered to be the result of proper speech level laryngeal positioning.

The secondary focuses of SLS are vowel modification and the handling of breaks in the voice (the *passaggio* points). This is demonstrated more in the prescribed exercises both written into the book and modeled on the companion CD of *Singing for the Stars*. Although similar to the Italian *bel canto* approach to vowel adjustment (*aggiustamento* in Italian) taught in many voice studios in the U.S., the SLS version is always focused on the posture of the larynx in conjunction with vowel modification. In fact, the only reason to modify a vowel during singing is to maintain the speech level position.

According to Riggs, after completing his 26 exercises for developing the SLS technique, a singer should have a “free, clear, flexible tone, with a blend of both upper and lower resonance qualities.”⁵ This assumption is based on the fact that by the time a singer masters these exercises, he/she should be able to maintain a speech level laryngeal position throughout his or her range. He does concede that singing exercises while maintaining one’s speech level position and applying that technique to actual repertoire can be challenging. Therefore, he includes in *SFTS* a section of exercises based on actual songs in order to practice maintaining the speech level while singing a song.

This brief overview of the SLS technique gives a little insight into what Seth Riggs teaches. In the following chapters, the comparison will be made between Riggs’s

⁵ Riggs, 71.

SLS (what he does and does not address in his method) and the techniques taught by the more conventional pedagogues in the U.S.

Chapter 2: Who is Against/For SLS

David Jones

Since the goal of this paper is to compare and contrast SLS to more traditional vocal training it is important to hear from teachers and students who either endorse or oppose the technique. The first half of this chapter will focus on teachers and authors who have written on the subject of using a speech related approach to singing. The second half contains interviews with students and teachers who answered a questionnaire on their experience studying SLS.

In researching the technique of Speech Level Singing, it is no surprise that one encounters some opposition to the idea. Although heralded by teachers and artists who teach and perform popular styles of vocal music (*American Idol* and musical theater), SLS is highly controversial to some “legitimate” authorities on singing. One of the most outspoken critics of the technique is pedagogue and author David L. Jones. Jones is the author of many articles on the art of singing that appear on his website [voiceteacher.com](http://www.voiceteacher.com). As a voice teacher, David Jones travels worldwide teaching an Italian/Swedish hybrid approach to singing. Jones’s personal vocal lineage starts with the famous voice teacher Alan Linquest. Linquest can be traced back to teachers who trained the German soprano Kirsten Flagstadt and Swedish tenor Jussi Bjoerling. David Jones frequently references the singing of Flagstadt and Bjoerling as the standard of proper singing technique.¹

Jones thoroughly bashes the technique of Speech Level Singing in his article “Speech Level Singing Training: Dangers and Benefits.” He never fully calls Seth Riggs out by name, but the language and references used in this article leave little doubt about

¹ David Jones, “History of the Swedish/Italian School of Singing,” http://www.voiceteacher.com/speech_level.html, accessed 6 October 2009.

whom Jones is writing.² He begins by first pointing out that Speech Level Singing is a contradictory idea. According to Jones, healthy singing requires much more acoustical space (inside the vocal tract and the breathing apparatus) than speaking. As previously stated in this paper, Riggs believes that if one follows his prescribed exercises (from SFTS), he or she will then have the tools to master the art of singing. Jones very much disagrees, saying “Opposite to what many book publishers would like you to think, there is no grid of exercises that will solve all the vocal issues of any individual singer.”³ He contends that there is no form of media (be it a book or CD of recorded exercises) that can fix one’s vocal faults. “Some media is more efficient than others, but any good teacher will tell you that nothing replaces an excellent vocal professional.”⁴

According to Jones, basing a singing technique on speech makes the assumption that one speaks in a healthy manner. Therefore, the technique can only work well if the singer already has a well-produced speaking voice. Jones defines speech level singing as simply words on pitch. He believes that speaking on pitch does not constitute “a complete technique for healthy singing.”⁵

With SLS’s heavy reliance on media (the book and CD’s), incorrect speaking habits of many individuals, and the idea that speech requires much less acoustical space than singing, Jones asserts that SLS is an incomplete method of teaching voice.

² David Jones, “Speech Level Singing Training: Dangers and Benefits,” <http://www.voiceteacher.com/speechlevel.html>, accessed 6 October 2009.

³ Jones, 1.

⁴ Jones, 1.

⁵ Jones, 1.

David Jones does admit that the speech level approach can have a positive effect for singers who practice the popular technique of belting. For those unfamiliar with the term, belting is a type of singing in which the chest register is taken very high into a singer's range. Belting is popular in musical theater and popular styles of singing. According to Jones, the speech level technique encourages the use of less vocal energy (less muscular pressure on the vocal cords), which can lead to a lighter approach to singing than the heavy technique of belting. "If a singer has a history of heavy belting or of placing tremendous breath pressure and/or muscular tension on the larynx while singing, this approach (SLS) can lessen the tension."⁶ The lighter approach induced by singing in a more speech related way helps to develop an approach that encourages less vocal cord mass. When one approaches belting this way, Jones says, the singer can then begin to mix more head voice (lighter production) into his or her vocal production.

According to Jones, SLS does lessen the tension on the voice but does not protect it as completely as a more conventional approach. The main difference is that the more traditional techniques taught in most studios encourage more acoustical space in the vocal tract which more fully protects the vocal mechanism. Therefore, as Jones puts it, the speech level technique simply becomes damage control for a singer whose technique relies heavily on belting.

One of the major advantages to SLS that Riggs claims is a hallmark of the technique is that of bridge balancing (the handling of *passaggio* points). Jones disagrees. He contends that a speech level approach makes the balancing of the vocal registers very

⁶ Jones, 2.

difficult.⁷ Jones says that the use of too much air pressure and bringing the heavier production of the lower range into the upper range is a major problem when singing contemporary music. The practice of taking the speaking (speech related) mechanism higher and higher without accommodating the upper register with more acoustical space is vocal abuse, according to Jones. “Some of the dangers [of SLS] are general swelling of the vocal cords, pre-polyp swelling, ballooning of the capillaries on the surface of the vocal cords, or vocal nodules.”⁸

Obviously, David Jones’s main argument against the technique of SLS is the perceived lack of acoustical space used while singing in this way. He closes his article on Speech Level Singing with a not-so-ambiguous attack on Riggs and his training methods:

There is a famous book on *speech level singing*, by a famous teacher that is selling internationally. This book contains a CD of vocal exercises. These exercises are absolute vocal abuse, yet this book is selling in tremendous numbers. The teacher was wise enough to hire young singers to perform these exercises. They sound relatively good because the practice of singing high on a closed throat has not yet damaged their voices. However, the vowels are distorted because of the closing of the throat and if one listens carefully, it is obvious that the appropriate acoustical space is **NOT** created as the singer goes higher and higher. The teacher speaks of lowering the larynx, yet demands that the singer make sounds that make a low larynx impossible. These young singers will suffer the frustration over time of lost vocal function.⁹

⁷ Jones, 4.

⁸ Jones, 4.

⁹ Jones, 6.

Jerome Hines

Jerome Hines offers a very insightful analysis of “singing like one speaks.” His long operatic career and extensive study of voice made Hines a credible expert on the subject of singing. In his book *Great Singers on Great Singing* Hines interviewed over forty of the world’s greatest singers about the intricacies of their techniques.¹⁰ The insights gained from these many interviews and his over forty-one seasons at the New York Metropolitan Opera led to the writing of his own book on vocal technique, *The Four Voices of Man*. In this book, Hines addresses many aspects of the training of singers, including the axiom of “sing like you speak.”

To Hines, the main difference between singing in a traditional classical technique and singing with a more speech related approach is all wrapped up in how the singer breathes. According to Hines, the only way to “sing as you speak” is to take no breath at all before one sings. The basic flaw to this technique, Hines states, is that it’s only applicable to people who already possess “a natural, beautifully placed speaking voice.”¹¹

Taking no breath at all (singing on residual air) is in complete contradiction to the traditional methods of breathing for singing. In traditional techniques, Hines points out, that inhalation includes the tensing of the diaphragm, while exhalation involves its relaxation. However, in speaking, he states, the opposite occurs. Exhalation is associated with the tensing of the support muscles of the abdomen while inhalation involves their relaxation. According to Hines, then, one uses his or her breath differently for singing than for speaking. Thus, Hines believes it is impossible to sing in exactly the same

¹⁰ Jerome Hines, *Great Singers on Great Singing* (New York: Proscenium Publishers Inc., 1982), 13.

¹¹ Jerome Hines, *The Four Voices of Man* (New York: Proscenium Publishers, 1997), 8.

manner as one speaks unless one were to use the breath in singing in the same manner as in speaking: simply put, singing without taking a preparatory breath.

Is this possible? Hines offers that it is. Without inhaling, speak a phrase. Count how many seconds it takes for the residual air to empty out. Hines observes that it takes about 15 seconds. To Hines, it takes less air to sing than to speak; meaning the air comes out slower due to vocal cord approximation that occurs while one sings. Thus one can sing longer on residual air than speaking allows.

According to Hines, the major advantage to singing in this manner is the gentle attack (gentle onset of sound).

The idea of attacking each singing phrase in a state of total relaxation is an appealing one because it allows the entire vocal apparatus to begin in a quiescent state. This way every attack can have a feather-light beginning and there is much less chance of abusing the vocal folds.

...If instead (instead of taking a preparatory breath), one sings without taking a breath, no matter how fatigued the breathing muscles become, every attack will still be gentle. That is the major advantage of this method.¹³

Jerome Hines states that singing in this manner can be unsettling at first. However, with practice and experience, one can gain confidence in this technique. It would seem, then, that Hines endorses “singing like you speak.”

Riggs’s Rebuttal

What does Seth Riggs have to say about the opinions of Jones and Hines? Riggs seems to be in agreement with both authors. As mentioned previously, Riggs believes that the emphasis on breathing as it pertains to singing has been greatly exaggerated. Riggs says that correct breathing is a byproduct of good singing technique. Riggs goes

¹³ Hines, 30-31.

on to say that “You indirectly develop the proper breath support for your tone as you condition your larynx not to move... When you use a speech level approach to singing, everything, including how much air you use to move your cords, happens automatically.”¹⁴

Riggs’s passive view on the role of breathing in singing lines up somewhat with Jerome Hines’s theory on breathing as it pertains to singing in the same manner as speaking. Obviously Riggs doesn’t go as far as to say that a singer shouldn’t breathe at all. However, it is interesting that Riggs says that how one uses his/her air should be automatic. The word automatic implies a lack of conscious effort. This is a very unique concept on the role of breathing in singing. In most schools of singing, breathing and breath management are major points of emphasis; not so, evidently in SLS.

It would seem that Riggs also agrees with Jones’s analysis of SLS. Riggs in fact does not focus on creating more acoustic space as one approaches the upper register.

If you can learn to initiate and maintain your tone
with this comfortable speech –level posture (of the larynx)
when you sing, you can sing with the same, easily produced
voice you use – or should be using – when you speak.
Nothing will feel any different in your throat or mouth.
Both your tone and words will feel natural and sound
natural.¹⁵

To try to accommodate certain parts of one’s range by making more space is, to Riggs, using outer muscles to achieve a certain sound or affect. Outer muscles are any muscles outside the larynx. They are primarily used in chewing, swallowing, and inhaling.¹⁶

¹⁴ Riggs, 78.

¹⁵ Riggs, 31.

¹⁶ Riggs, 31.

On the issue of balancing the *passaggio* (or passage areas) Riggs also has a differing opinion from Jones. Again, Jones encourages creating more space as one ascends the scale. Riggs's theory is to let the muscles of the larynx do the work. In order to let that happen, Riggs says that a singer should lessen the air pressure used in singing.

When you reduce the amount of air you send to your vocal cords, you make it possible for the muscles "inside" your larynx to stretch your vocal cords by themselves... Your outer muscles will interfere in the vibration process whenever you use more air than your vocal cords and the other muscles inside your larynx are able to handle.¹⁷

In the question of balancing, yet again Riggs points to the position of the larynx as the cure for any problems one might have in negotiating tricky areas of one's vocal range. "A relaxed and stable larynx results in a stable resonance system in which your voice always contains an appropriate balance of top, middle, and bottom harmonic qualities, no matter where in your range you sing."¹⁸

When trying to figure out how to let one's larynx maintain the stable, relaxed position that Riggs calls speech level, he says that the outer muscles will try to interfere. In essence, one will have to learn how to let these muscles be passive. This will lead to some tension as the outer muscles resist losing control. Riggs offers advice on this:

Never work around these tensions by doing things like changing the position of your tongue and jaw, raising your soft palate, making more space in your throat, or changing the pronunciation of your words. You will only create other tensions.¹⁹

¹⁷ Riggs, 35.

¹⁸ Riggs, 37.

¹⁹ Riggs, 38.

Riggs's instructions to avoid manipulations of the tongue, jaw, and soft palate as well as to refrain from making more space in the throat is in contradiction to Jones's method of teaching (and many of his articles on voiceteacher.com). However, it does back up Jones's warnings about SLS training. Riggs's approach to singing offers the alternative of a different point of emphasis than the more widely accepted concept of "creating more space." He advocates for singers to get the larynx under control and let everything else fall into place on its own.

Riggs's answer to finding the optimal laryngeal position, and thus the optimal technique, is to follow the training regimen in his book, *Singing For The Stars*, along with the CD's to re-program the mind and voice.

Once you have successfully re-programmed your neuromuscular system to accept your voice's functioning at your speech level, these tensions (resistance of the outer muscles) will disappear. You will then be able to sing with release, a condition in which your voice works without your having to think about it.²⁰

Students of SLS

Nothing speaks louder about the merits and/or draw-backs of a technique than those who have actually studied it. Therefore, seven singers were interviewed to compare their experience with both classical training and SLS training. Each singer has varying degrees of experience in each type of training; however, they have all exhibited the ability to succeed as professional musicians. They were each asked the same questions. Their insight was invaluable for the comparison of traditional and SLS training.

²⁰ Riggs, 38.

Philip Webb

Philip Webb is an American tenor who has received critical acclaim after launching his career in operatic and classical music. In 1993, after nearly twelve years as a church music minister, Webb was encouraged by the renowned bass Giorgio Tozzi to pursue a career in opera. He immediately embarked on an intensive program of studies and training. In the fall of 1993 he began studying vocal technique with one of the best-known vocal teachers of her day, Margaret Harshaw, formerly of the Metropolitan Opera and the Indiana School of Music. In 2001 he began a series of studies with the internationally acclaimed Verdian tenor Carlo Bergonzi. Philip now studies Speech Level Singing with Seth Riggs. Riggs's teaching has been very influential in Philip's career, and Riggs continues to be involved in all of Philip's future role preparations.

Philip Webb Interview

1. In your opinion what would you say is the major difference between Speech Level Singing (SLS) and the traditional voice training you received in the university/private studio setting?

SLS focuses on a more natural vocal production, and then builds on that foundation. Too often, in a context of "opera training" there is a lot of effort put into manufacturing the sound. Certainly, this is not true of all teachers or vocal techniques, but it is more common than it should be. SLS leads the voice to a natural, healthy manner of singing.

2. How has SLS improved your vocal performance?

I have learned to feel muscle and placement sensations, that I never did in the previous years. I have

also learned the value of working with the voice in areas, such as falsetto, that I may not use, but are of great value in training.

3. Are there any challenges or pitfalls to singing using the SLS technique? What are they?

I think that you have to learn that it is a tool to produce the type or style of singing you want to do. In the case of operatic singing, SLS is a tool that you can use as a foundation and then build upon as you begin working with the required repertoire.

4. In your experience with SLS, what is your understanding/definition of “placement”?

My understanding of placement involves two principles. One is the actual placement of the voice, which naturally leads to the second, which is the physical and acoustical sensations associated with this placement.

5. In your experience with SLS training, what is your understanding/definition of breath support/breath management?

Breath support leads to and upholds the definition of ‘placement.’ The two work together in tandem.

6. Do you use vowel modification in your singing? Why or why not?

I don’t attempt to modify the vowel outwardly, but I let natural modification happen on the higher pitches.

7. Is there a certain exercise that helps you find your speech level position (laryngeal position) when you sing? What is it (hard to write down, I know)?

Recently, I have found that the tongue trill on 1, 3, 5 and 8, then opening up to an ooh or an o has been very challenging, but rewarding in its benefits.

8. From the perspective of SLS, how do you breathe for singing? (i.e. expanded rib cage; fill the back up with air; fill lower abs; fill up chest, etc.)

These are issues I addressed before SLS.

9. How is posture addressed in your experience with SLS?

These are issues I addressed before SLS.

10. Does position/shape of the mouth play any role in singing correctly?

It can as you go up the scale, dropping the jaw can help the connection. However, you must be careful to not force the jaw down.

11. Based on what you've been taught through SLS, how do you handle your breaks (*passaggio* points)?

By pulling the voice up into the soft palate area and mixing more head voice into the transition notes.

12. What role do the lips play in singing? The nose? The jaw?

They can help with keeping the mix going through certain areas of the voice. However, they can also become a bad habit. You must learn why you modify them, and not overdo it.

13. Would you recommend studying the SLS technique to all singers? Why or why not?

Yes, it is very helpful in giving singers feelings and sensations. It can provide a solid foundation.

14. Overall would you say that singing in this manner has brought you more success as a performer? Why or why not?

Yes, it has helped my career immensely. Some would say it has resulted in my high notes being more solid and my voice sounding more even throughout its range.

15. How long did you study the SLS technique?

It has been about four years.

16. Do you currently study with an SLS teacher?

Yes.

17. If you had it to do over again, would you have started off from the beginning training your voice in this manner (SLS) instead of going the traditional route of college/private, classical studios? Why or why not?

Yes, if I knew that the opportunity existed.

Virginia Norwood

Virginia Norwood opened her San Diego, CA, studio in 1994. In 1997 she expanded to Solana Beach, CA. She currently holds a Level 4 certification from Speech Level Singing International. Virginia has performed in working bands since 1981 and has opened for Kansas and Big Bill Morganfield (son of the great blues musician Muddy Waters). She has made many recording projects as a singing artist herself. As a teacher, she primarily works with students interested in Rock, Pop, Country, R&B, Gospel, and Musical Theater. Virginia's traditional academic training came from San Diego State University-California State University from which she earned a Bachelor of Arts in Music.

Virginia Norwood Interview

1. In your opinion, what would you say is the major difference between Speech Level Singing (SLS) and the traditional voice training you received in the university/private studio setting?

The SLS method is very clear, easily understood, and results oriented. When I studied classical singing, my teachers would ask me to do certain exercises, but never explained why I was doing that exercise, or what the exercise was supposed to achieve. With SLS, the exercises are considered tools to help the student experience the correct feelings that occur with proper vocal production, which are: proper cord adduction with the proper air/muscle balance for a stable larynx that remains in a neutral position, with very little up or down movement.

Each exercise is chosen specifically for that student's needs at that moment. SLS teachers are discouraged from using adjectives in their teaching. Only clear instruction that means the same thing to every student. For example, one should never hear an SLS teacher say, "Feel a pear shape in the mouth as you go for the high notes." I have heard classical teachers say this. Instead, an SLS teacher will choose an exercise that will keep the proper air/muscle balance and cord adduction so that the student will experience the feeling of ease, quality of tone, and good intonation that only occurs with a balanced voice.

2. How has SLS improved your vocal performance?

SLS has enabled me to achieve and maintain close to a four octave range. My bridges are easily managed, and I can sing for long periods of time without tiring. At 49, my voice continues to improve, and I can vocalize up to an Ab6 on a daily basis. I can easily switch between genres from Rock to Musical Theatre to Classical to R&B, etc. The vocal tone varies between genres, but the principles of the SLS technique are the same: proper cord adduction + proper air muscle balance + proper vowel pronunciation = a neutral, stable larynx.

3. Are there any challenges or pitfalls to singing using the SLS technique? What are they?

As with learning any musical instrument, one must practice! SLS is not magic. You see results quickly if you practice and apply.

4. In your experience with SLS, what is your understanding/definition of "placement"?

My understanding of "placement" is that it should be a result and not a goal. With the SLS method we avoid asking a student to "place" their voice, or any descriptive words that imply the student try to manipulate the voice into doing something. Instead, I would choose an exercise that balances the voice (proper air/muscle balance, proper cord adduction, proper vowel pronunciation), which would enable the student to feel the sensations produced on each pitch.

5. In your experience with SLS training, what is your understanding/definition of breath support/breath management?

Breath is essential to singing and to all life. Singers do not need to take huge breaths. It is the control of the exhalation for proper air/muscle balance that is important.

6. Do you use vowel modification in your singing? Why or why not?

In SLS we strive for pure vowel pronunciation. I find that the vowels may vary slightly between genres. For example, one would not pronounce the same in a classical song as they would in a country song, or one wouldn't capture the style or the sound for that specific genre. One must strive for the purest vowel pronunciation in that specific genre to avoid hiking or dropping the larynx.

7. Is there a certain exercise that helps you find your speech level position (laryngeal position) for when you sing? What is it (hard to write down, I know).

The exercises are chosen specifically for the student's needs at that moment. Whatever works to balance the voice. For instance, if one is having a particularly stressful day, the voice may feel a bit tight with a heightened larynx, and might need a hooty exercise to release tension and lower the larynx back to neutral. On the other hand, if one is a bit low on energy at that moment, one might need an exercise like a 'bratty Nay' to get better cord adduction (again balancing air & muscle).

8. From the perspective of SLS, how do you breathe for singing? (i.e. expanded rib cage; fill the back up with air; fill lower abs; fill up chest, etc.)

The abdomen moves forward to allow the diaphragm to drop. The action of the diaphragm dropping will pull air into the lungs. I strive for a low breath that involves only the movement that occurs when the diaphragm drops. The movement of the rib cage and chest are results of the breath filling the lungs. Starting with a low breath is essential for starting a song phrase or vocal exercise with a neutral larynx.

9. How is posture addressed in your experience with SLS?

Good posture is important for proper breath support, vocal balance, and professional appearance. The shoulders are back and down, but relaxed. The tailbone is tucked under to keep a straight spine.

10. Does position/shape of the mouth play any role in singing correctly?

Yes. The way one shapes their vowels will affect their vocal balance including tone, pitch and larynx position. For example, wider splatty vowels can cause the larynx to rise resulting in a more shouty and/or nasal tone.

11. Based on what you've been taught through SLS, how do you handle your breaks (*passaggio* points)?

The bridges are prepared for by working towards proper air/muscle balance and cord adduction at the beginning of each phrase or scale, then maintaining that balance and narrowing the vowels through the *passaggio*.

12. What role do the lips play in singing? The nose? The jaw?

The lips are used to shape the vowels and form the words. The nose and nasopharynx are an integral part of the vocal resonance, along with the oral pharynx and chest cavity. Although the sound is produced by the vocal cords, the resonance is felt in the cavities of the chest, mouth and head; thus, the terms chest, middle & head registers. The jaw is instrumental in pronunciation and air/muscle balance. The way one combines the use of the lips with the movement of the jaw greatly affects tone, pitch and pronunciation.

13. Would you recommend studying the SLS technique to all singers? Why or why not?

Yes, I have seen nothing but great results with SLS. It can be applied to any style, in any language, at any age.

14. Overall would you say that singing in this manner has brought you more success as a performer? Why or why not?

Yes, I no longer have to worry about my voice lasting throughout a performance. My band usually plays 2-4 hours. Any physical movements I make onstage are for the purpose of emotion or choreography, and never to facilitate vocal production. I receive many compliments at my shows on my vocal agility, range and versatility.

15. How long did you study the SLS technique?

I haven't stopped studying. Being in good voice is a lifelong process. Vocalizing is still part of my daily regimen even after 20+ years.

16. Do you currently study with an SLS teacher?

Yes. Much like an athletic coach, a vocal coach is a trained professional who can hear and make you aware of things you may not notice on your own regardless of your training. A vocalist is hearing their voice mixed with some of the inner resonance that they feel. The voice teacher is hearing only the produced sound. The two perceptions can be different.

17. If you had it to do over again, would you have started off from the beginning training your voice in this manner (SLS) instead of going the traditional route of college/private, classical studios? Why or why not?

Yes, I would only study SLS. Had I been able to begin my training with SLS in my youth, I would have become "the singer I Knew I could be" in my early 20's rather than my 40's. I believe it would have changed the course of my professional singing career dramatically.

Natalie Bergeron

American soprano, Natalie Bergeron, is a member of the Evelyn Lear, Thomas Stewart Emerging Wagner Singers program of Washington D.C. by whom she is sponsored in all Wagnerian coaching and concert performances for the German Embassy

in our nation's capital. In 2009 she made her Carnegie Hall debut in the Liederkrantz Gala Concert. Natalie is a doctoral student in voice at the University of Memphis.

Natalie Bergeron Interview

1. In your opinion, what would you say is the major difference between Speech Level Singing (SLS) and the traditional voice training you received in the university/private studio setting?

The major difference between the majority of the traditional training I have received and SLS training is that SLS focuses on keeping a connection to your core speech mechanism of chest voice or *voce di petto* throughout your entire range, where traditional training incorporates "covering" the voice throughout its entire range.

2. How has SLS improved your vocal performance?

Immensely. I now have the ability to trust every note and can choose from an extreme range of colors for portraying the text as well as producing a more "thrilling" sound.

3. Are there any challenges or pitfalls to singing using the SLS technique? What are they?

Absolutely. As in any type of vocal technique, issues will arise if taken to the extreme. With SLS the urge to sing "wide-out" (or carry the chest voice too high), especially above and through both *passaggi*, is greater than other traditional techniques. This can be very dangerous to not only the vocal cords, but to the consistency of performance.

4. In your experience with SLS, what is your understanding/definition of "placement"?

There is no "placement." The air goes up the back of the throat, resonates where it naturally wants to go, and then flows out of your body.

5. In your experience with SLS training, what is your understanding/definition of breath support/breath management?

This is the most crucial part of SLS, because SLS technique WILL NOT WORK if the breath is not managed correctly. The breath must come from the lungs while feeling like you are singing into the largest part of your body. As the breath goes through the larynx it must flow constantly and consistently while not putting too much emphasis on feeling anything in the larynx. It is simply a passage for the air, and the tilt of the larynx should only change between *passaggi*.

6. Do you use vowel modification in your singing? Why or why not?

Yes, it is necessary to a degree above the two higher *passaggi* (for a soprano, other voice types may not have two higher *passaggi*). I do want to clarify that this is to a small degree, not enough to cause a constant covering of the voice, but enough to keep our native language habits from impeding the necessary tilt of the larynx in the higher voice.

7. Is there a certain exercise that helps you find your speech level position (laryngeal position) for when you sing? What is it (hard to write down, I know)?

Absolutely, there are a couple: "g-uh, g-uh, g-uh" [gə gə gə] on a fast scale will immediately connect you to the larynx. Basically sing fast scales or *arpeggi* on a vowel with a glottal consonant in front of it. My favorite is to start all warm-ups with the vowel "long-e" [i] on the bottom note always starting in the lower middle and chest and going up using a scale or arpeggio on the [i], and landing on the top note singing "la" [la] which keeps you from carrying the chest too high. Of course this exercise only works through the main upper passage. Once you are in a heavier head mix then you must change from the [i] earlier in the scale; i.e. [i-i-a-a-la] (see Appendix C).

8. From the perspective of SLS, how do you breathe for singing? (i.e. expanded rib cage; fill the back up with air; fill lower abs; fill up chest, etc.)

No one person feels the breath in the same way because we are all different sizes and shapes. The rule of thumb should be to always breathe into the largest part of your body. For me that is my abdominal and hip area. I have always been consistently told to feel the breath in my back, this only works for me while sitting down and my abdominal mass has nowhere to go. When I stand up the breath does in fact fill up the back as well as the sides and front -almost like an inner tube (I can see it in the mirror this way) but I feel it deeper than my back.

9. How is posture addressed in your experience with SLS?

It never really has been, probably in an effort to keep me from focusing on this and becoming tight. So I simply think that relaxation or better yet, let's say a freeness of muscles for moving around easily is best.

10. Does position/shape of the mouth play any role in singing correctly?

Loaded question! Ok, yes the back of the mouth must stay open and most often you will find that the front of the mouth will naturally be closed in the middle and lower registers, but you **MUST** allow the singer to open their mouth as they go higher. If you don't, the sound will "swallow" and force an unnatural cover which impedes the natural tilt of the larynx above the *passaggio*.

11. Based on what you've been taught through SLS, how do you handle your breaks
(*passaggio* points)?

There is simply a slight tilt which happens between the note previous to the break and the one over it. Please note that if the breath is not working properly, nothing you do in the passage will be correct, and it will eventually cause blisters and nodes on the vocal cords because you will under or over sing in an effort to push through the *passaggio*.

12. What role do the lips play in singing? The nose? The jaw?

Lips: simply there to help you form plosive consonants. Nose: just there to let some of the air out.

Jaw: nothing that I can think of besides being something that your skin is connected to and helps to open the space in the back of your mouth.

13. Would you recommend studying the SLS technique to all singers? Why or why not?

I would be very wary of recommending it to any singer unless I was sure the teacher of the technique actually understood the difference between pure SLS and the necessity to modify the technique to include a true *chiaroscuro*, which is necessary to healthy singing production.

14. Overall would you say that singing in this manner has brought you more success as a performer? Why or Why not?

Yes. I am more comfortable with my voice and understand significantly more about what is going inside of my body, which actually allows me to get out of my own way, and let things happen as naturally as possible.

15. How long did you study the SLS technique?

6 months recently, and 3 years in undergrad without knowing it.

16. Do you currently study with an SLS teacher?

Yes.

17. If you had it to do over again, would you have started off from the beginning training your voice in this manner (SLS) instead of going the traditional route of college/private, classical studios? Why or why not?

Yes, I did start this way, but wish I had continued and not gone the traditional route.

Wes Hampton

Wes Hampton is one of the tenors in the award winning Christian/Gospel group The Gaither Vocal Band. Wes has been touring with Gaither singing to thousands of

people around the world since 2004. Before joining the Gaither Vocal Band, he was on the worship music staff at The Church at Brook Hills in Birmingham, Alabama, for seven years. Wes's traditional/classical training came from Trevecca University in Nashville, Tennessee, and the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB). However, during his time touring with the Gaithers, Wes has also studied the Speech Level technique.

Wes Hampton Interview

1. In your opinion what would you say is the major difference between Speech Level Singing and the traditional voice training you received in the university/private studio setting?

I think the main difference is the amount of effort used while singing. With speech level singing, you rely heavily on using your mixed voice and balancing the amount of chest and head voice, depending on what you're wanting to achieve. For the most part, I don't sing as hard using SLS. Also, using SLS has allowed me to focus on vocal licks and runs, which is obviously not as much a part of traditional/classical training. I'm more of a pop/inspirational type singer, and this technique is well-suited for me.

2. How has SLS improved your vocal performance?

I'm not sure I would go as far to say that it has improved my performance. I think it has just opened up new doors vocally for me. It's just a different way of arriving at the same conclusion. To me, it's more fun singing this way than using traditional training technique. I love finding new mixes (i.e. using a chestier sound or going for a lighter, headier sound).

3. Are there any challenges or pitfalls to singing using the SLS technique? What are they?

I think the main challenge for me, as with any singer using any technique, is figuring out and mastering

the technique. Finding time to really commit to practice is hard for me, especially having a family now.

4. In your experience with SLS, what is your understanding/definition of “placement”?

Even before experiencing SLS, my understanding of placement was basically where you choose to focus your tone. Throaty vs. forward, heady vs. chesty, nasal/pharyngeal tone vs. centered tone, head tone vs. falsetto.

5. In your experience with SLS training, what is your understanding/definition of breath support/breath management?

It’s the same as what I learned with traditional technique. Focus on breathing deeply from the abdomen. Concentrate on letting your stomach expand and contract, not your chest.

6. Do you use vowel modification in your singing? Why or why not?

I find that manipulating the vowel can make it easier for me to hit a note, specifically long “e” [i] sounds (see Appendix C). If I place the [i] more forward in my mouth (more right behind my front teeth), I can more easily and clearly hit the note.

7. Is there a certain exercise that helps you find your speech level position (laryngeal position) for when you sing? What is it? (hard to write down, I know).

I do lip rolls/tongue trills to help me warm up as well as “reset” my larynx. I always focus on a “dopey” or darker tone. This really gets my larynx down nice and low.

8. From the perspective of SLS, how do you breathe for singing? (i.e. expanded rib cage; fill the back up with air; fill lower abs; fill up chest, etc.)

I find myself expanding my rib cage the most. That’s what comes most naturally to me. To be honest, I didn’t learn much about breathing from SLS. Traditional training is what taught me that.

9. How is posture addressed in your experience with SLS?

SLS focuses on a relaxed posture, especially focusing on relieving tension from the jaw and neck areas.

10. Does position/shape of the mouth play any role in singing correctly?

I think the position/shape of the mouth plays a big role in trying to sing vowels a certain way, depending on what you're going for.

11. Based on what you've been taught through SLS, how do you handle your breaks (*passaggio* points)?

To me, SLS is incredible at bridging the gaps or breaks in my voice. The lip rolls/tongue trills are what beginners use to first find their mix. If you do these correctly, you will automatically bridge your breaks.

12. What role do the lips play in singing? The nose? The jaw?

For me, the lips help me shape vowels. The nose helps with my pharyngeal mix (or that pointed, notorious southern gospel tenor sound!), but I've learned to use enough of it to get the sound I'm after without going too far nasally. The jaw plays a huge part in tension vs. no tension for me. On any given night, I could have a lot of tension or not much tension at all, depending on how tired I am.

13. Would you recommend studying the SLS technique to all singers? Why or why not?

I think SLS deserves a shot from everyone. I know some traditionalists frown upon this technique, and to be honest, that's fine by me. SLS just works for me. It's easy to understand and it comes very naturally for me. Using this technique has played a part in me getting to live out my dream."

14. Overall would you say that singing in this manner has brought you more success as a performer? Why or why not?

Yes, most definitely. It's allowed me to do things with my voice I never thought I would do from a platform. It's opened new doors for me by showing that there are different sides to my voice.

15. How long did you study the SLS technique?

Believe it or not, I was actually using this technique before I even knew it existed. I don't know if it was just pure luck or what, but once I began studying it, I realized this is what felt most natural for my voice. It's what I had been using for quite some time. In my first session with my teacher, he told me after my initial assessment that I was about 95% on track with the SLS technique. I was blown away. Again, I'm not sure why it clicked with me, but it did. Understanding SLS more and more has "loosened" up my voice. I'm still not where I want to be vocally, but that gives me something to work toward!

16. Do you currently study with an SLS/SS teacher?

I do not, but wish I could.

17. If you had it to do over again, would you have started off from the beginning training your voice in this manner (SLS/SS) instead of going the traditional route of college/private, classical studios? Why or why not?

No, I would not. I am extremely thankful for the traditional training I received. It's important to learn the basics of singing and breathing correctly. I think once one understands that, he can then begin to explore other avenues, styles, and techniques of singing.

Maryann Kyle

In demand as one of the finest vocal coaches of belt, legit and classical vocal technique, Dr. Maryann Kyle has dedicated her professional life to guiding singers in their pursuit not only of exceptional singing, but also of captivating performance. Kyle has extensive experience teaching, coaching, and performing opera, recitals, concerts and Broadway shows. As a lyric soprano, she is an active performer of opera, concert, and

recital repertoire, and has shared the concert stage with some of world's greatest artists. She also has appeared as a soloist on the pop music stage with famed artists Patti Labelle, Patti Austin, Dionne Warwick, Ann Nesby and Vesta Williams.

Dr. Kyle is currently Associate Professor of voice at The University of Southern Mississippi where she is Director of the Southern Opera and Music Theatre Company's Outreach and Workshop program. Her classical/traditional training is from the University of Southern Mississippi and Louisiana State University. In conjunction with her classical training, Dr. Kyle has also been a student of Speech Level Singing.

Maryann Kyle Interview

1. In your opinion, what would you say is the major difference between Speech Level Singing (SLS) and the traditional voice training you received in the university/private studio setting?

SLS allows the larynx to be passive. Meaning it can float without the added tension of outer muscles. A lot of times in traditional/classical training one learns to manipulate the position of the larynx in order to get a desired timbre or sound. This can be counterproductive. Typically the result is tension in the tongue which greatly disrupts laryngeal stability.

2. How has SLS improved your vocal performance?

It became the foundation by which I've built my entire technique. Thus I use it heavily in my teaching as well.

3. Are there any challenges or pitfalls to singing using the SLS technique? What are they?

In an attempt to maintain stability in the larynx, the surrounding muscles in the throat can get tense. That must be avoided and worked out through time and practice. Also, be careful not to try to open too much as you ascend the scale (especially the *passaggio*). The articulators must be used correctly to help keep a speech related aspect to your sound.

4. In your experience with SLS, what is your understanding/definition of “placement”?

It is not overly addressed. It’s less about trying to place the voice. That can lead to posturing (tucking the chin, opening the mouth too much, tension in the face... etc). Focus more on the hard palate (where we speak).

5. In your experience with SLS training, what is your understanding/definition of breath support/breath management?

Not really addressed in SLS. I got that more from my classical training and my own experimentation.

6. Do you use vowel modification in your singing? Why or why not?

Not too much. I modify mostly in the extremes of my range. For the most part I try to keep it as pure and natural as possible.

7. Is there a certain exercise that helps you find your speech level position (laryngeal position) for when you sing? What is it (hard to write down, I know)?

Yes. I first speak a note in order to feel the sensation of how it feels when I speak it. I then apply that sensation to when I add the element of singing to the tone. Basically, you simply add a little more breath flow, and depending on where I am in my range, I let the articulators adjust for the amount of space needed. Also, I use a closed “ee” [i] or “oo” [u] (see Appendix C) in the low to mid-range and ascend by ½ steps keeping the same speech/resonance quality all the way up. This is particularly handy in teaching a healthy “belt” technique to female students.

8. From the perspective of SLS, how do you breathe for singing? (i.e. expanded rib cage; fill the back up with air; fill lower abs; fill up chest, etc.)

Not really addressed in SLS. I learned this more in my classical training.

9. How is posture addressed in your experience with SLS?

It is not overly emphasized. The more relaxed and natural, the better.

10. Does position/shape of the mouth play any role in singing correctly?

Yes, but it's actually more in conjunction with the tongue. Tongue placement usually affects the mouth shape.

11. Based on what you've been taught through SLS, how do you handle your breaks (*passaggio* points)?

Basically, in order to maintain a speech level in the *passaggio*, keep the vowel small. Don't open up too much, or you can distort the articulators past the point of being related to how you communicate when speaking.

12. What role do the lips play in singing? The nose? The jaw?

They are basic articulators.

13. Would you recommend studying the SLS technique to all singers? Why or why not?

Yes, especially combined with some traditional, classical training. It keeps a thread of simplicity in how we make sounds as singers.

14. Overall would you say that singing in this manner has brought you more success as a performer? Why or why not?

Absolutely! It taught me how to troubleshoot and figure out tough spots in my voice by applying the principles I learned. Again, it greatly helped my teaching as well.

15. How long did you study the SLS technique?

Around 15 years.

16. Do you currently study with an SLS teacher?

No. But I use the principles in my own singing and teaching.

17. If you had it to do over again, would you have started off from the beginning training your voice in this manner (SLS) instead of going the traditional route of college/private, classical studios? Why or why not?

Yes, it would have made everything so much easier!

Brett Manning

Brett Manning is an American singer and vocal coach. Over the course of his career Manning has trained many well-known music artists including Taylor Swift, Miley Cyrus, Keith Urban, and Wes Hampton. He has also coached several Grammy and CMA Award winners, as well as recent Broadway casts of *Les Misérables*, *Jekyll & Hyde*, and Elton John's *Aida*.

Brett Manning is the author of *Singing Success* a learn-at-home vocal training program. Manning currently runs a vocal studio on Music Row in Nashville, Tennessee, Brett Manning Studios. Brett also teaches his vocal techniques through seminars and workshops around the world. In 2008 Manning was featured as a vocal coach and judge on CMT's television talent search, *Can You Duet*. Brett's experience with both traditional/classical training and Speech Level Singing have greatly influenced his own teaching and singing.

Brett Manning Interview

1. In your opinion, what would you say is the major difference between Speech Level Singing (SLS) and the traditional voice training you received in the university/private studio setting?

Oftentimes traditional technique causes one to sing in a manner that is rigid. This approach is opposed to the concepts of speech. This can make singing harder.

2. How has SLS improved your vocal performance?

It helped to bring my voice back to center; a more natural approach to singing.

3. Are there any challenges or pitfalls to singing using the SLS technique? What are they?

Sometimes in an attempt to achieve perfect speech level at all times, one can become just as rigid in his/her technique as those who utilize a more traditional technique. All things in moderation! Also, speech level makes the assumption that everyone speaks in a way that would lead to a good vocal technique. That is not always the case.

4. In your experience with SLS, what is your understanding/definition of “placement”?

It’s not overly emphasized. Placement assumes directing the voice to a place. Placement is a byproduct of correctly achieving speech level.

5. In your experience with SLS training, what is your understanding/definition of breath support/breath management?

It’s not overly emphasized. You just keep the rib cage comfortably high. Breathing should be as natural as possible.

6. Do you use vowel modification in your singing? Why or why not?

Vowels stay pure. They narrow a bit as one ascends the scale. However, they mostly stay related to how one speaks them.

7. Is there a certain exercise that helps you find your speech level position (laryngeal position) for when you sing? What is it (hard to write down, I know)?

Yes, exercises on “mum” help me find my speech related position.

8. From the perspective of SLS, how do you breathe for singing? (i.e. expanded rib cage; fill the back up with air; fill lower abs; fill up chest, etc.)

Already addressed in question 5.

9. How is posture addressed in your experience with SLS?

Hold the body comfortably high (noble). It is not overly emphasized.

10. Does position/shape of the mouth play any role in singing correctly?

Just don't open the mouth too much.

11. Based on what you've been taught through SLS, how do you handle your breaks (*passaggio* points)?

Make sure the larynx stays stable (down), then keep the sound balanced with pharyngeal resonance.

12. What role do the lips play in singing? The nose? The jaw?

They are basic articulators. One doesn't “direct” the sound to one place or the other.

13. Would you recommend studying the SLS technique to all singers? Why or why not?

Yes, but one needs to understand that there are other approaches that are valid and work as well.

14. Overall would you say that singing in this manner has brought you more success as a performer? Why or why not?

Overall, yes. It helped me to find a more natural approach to singing.

15. How long did you study the SLS technique?

About 12 years.

16. Do you currently study with an SLS teacher?

No, but I'm still affiliated with some of them.

17. If you had it to do over again, would you have started off from the beginning training your voice in this manner (SLS) instead of going the traditional route of college/private, classical studios? Why or why not?

No, I would have found a technique that separated all of the registers first, then put them back together.

John White

John White has spent most of his singing career as a baritone. Only recently has he made the transition to tenor as he began his doctoral studies in voice at the University of Southern Mississippi. John's traditional/classical training came from The Baptist College of Florida and the University of Florida. He has had brief experience with the concepts of Speech Level Singing in conjunction with his classical training.

John White Interview

1. In your opinion, what would you say is the major difference between Speech Level Singing (SLS) and the traditional voice training you received in the university/private studio setting?

The basic difference to my understanding is the intentional manipulation of the larynx in SLS. My vocal training (classical approach) focused on a stable larynx with the ability to freely float.

2. How has SLS improved your vocal performance?

It has aided me in balancing my belt voice with a less muscular approach. I have used it to learn the balance between over-singing and under-singing.

3. Are there any challenges or pitfalls to singing using the SLS technique? What are they?

I feel that the SLS method does not allow a singer to be fully functional in every genre or time period of music. I feel that the SLS technique does not focus on singing with an open throat and a full use of the acoustical space used in traditional singing methodology. Another area that is not fully addressed through SLS is the management of breath. When one uses the breath, the acoustical space in the mouth/throat must be opened and allow energy to fill it. The other problem is that this technique does not serve the music. In my opinion, the music serves the technique. This is in contrast with the development of the bel canto technique and its direct correlation with the historic development of opera.

4. In your experience with SLS, what is your understanding/definition of “placement”?

In my experience, SLS focuses on speaking on pitch. It focuses on finding a fixed feeling of resonance, or a fixed sensation. When studying this method, the feeling of resonance was very similar to the sensations felt in normal speech. There are no extremes, no feeling of upper head resonance, or a connection of chest and head registers.

In this type of singing, sung/speech is the intended production.

5. In your experience with SLS training, what is your understanding/definition of breath support/breath management?

This is the area in which there is little focus. The technique uses the concept of less energy for singing. This may help singers who are belters to achieve a less muscular production. However, for beginning singers, this technique does not work toward a full use of the breathing mechanism. I feel that it is too light an approach that places the bulk of the work on the laryngeal musculature rather than on the breathing apparatus.

6. Do you use vowel modification in your singing? Why or why not?

I personally do not endorse vowel modification. I endorse an understanding of space that is connected intrinsically to breath speed. As breath speed increases, so must the acoustical space. Without this balance there will be negative effect on spin (not vibrato), pitch, and increased subglottic pressure will result.

7. Is there a certain exercise that helps you find your speech level position (laryngeal position) for when you sing? What is it (hard to write down, I know)?

The teacher I studied with used an exercise on a pure vowel that began with a low vocal fry, and slurred upward until I was in pure falsetto. He said that this was the best way to understand bridging the gap between the registers, while keeping the speech level production intact.

8. From the perspective of SLS, how do you breathe for singing? (i.e. expanded rib cage; fill the back up with air; fill lower abs; fill up chest, etc.)

Speech level singing does not address breathing in depth. Instead, it compares the breath for singing to that of conversational speech. This type of breathing does not allow the “open” body that should be present when singing fully supported. While I do not think that specific spot

breathing is good, I do think a general sense of “open body” should be the aim.

9. How is posture addressed in your experience with SLS?

In my experience, I was instructed to stand upright and picture myself being suspended from the ceiling by my upper chest.

10. Does position/shape of the mouth play any role in singing correctly?

The main role is played by the acoustical space, a naturally floating larynx, and a controlled breath release. However, it is important to shape vowels and colors through the pharynx. This is how singers achieve color and timbre contrast.

11. Based on what you’ve been taught through SLS, how do you handle your breaks (*passaggio* points)?

Based on my experience, the object of SLS is to keep the larynx in a fixed position. This does not allow for any movement of the vocal mechanism. Pharyngeal shaping is not addressed in the SLS technique. It seems that in the SLS technique, there is no “break.” The feeling of speech is intended to be maintained throughout the range of the voice.

12. What role do the lips play in singing? The nose? The jaw?

I would say they are no more than articulators. They aren’t overly emphasized in SLS.

13. Would you recommend studying the SLS technique to all singers? Why or why not?

I feel that SLS has its benefits, particularly to those singing pop, gospel, or music that demands the use of belting. However, this method has its faults. I feel that strictly adhering to this technique will not allow a singer to be flexible and able to sing every genre of music. If one looks through the repertoire of classical vocal music, it is clear that different time periods require different levels of vocal production, particularly in the operatic repertoire. I

feel that this technique would not allow a singer to easily sing music from different time periods effectively.

14. Overall would you say that singing in this manner has brought you more success as a performer? Why or Why not?

Yes. It definitely helped my confidence in my technique. I used SLS combined with my classical training, though.

15. How long did you study the SLS technique?

I only studied it for a short period of time. It was used in conjunction with a classical approach.

16. Do you currently study with an SLS teacher?

No.

17. If you had it to do over again, would you have started off from the beginning training your voice in this manner (SLS) instead of going the traditional route of college/private, classical studios? Why or why not?

I feel that the bel canto technique is without question the place to start. It is important to be able to sing different genres, and in doing so, SLS would come in handy. However, in terms of developing a solid fundamental technique, I feel that a classical approach addresses more areas that are fundamental to a solid technique than does SLS.

Observations

The answers given by each singer reflect the fact that the art of singing is truly both personal and subjective. Most of the singers interviewed stated that they did not learn much about breathing while studying the SLS technique. This very much lines up with the observations in this document concerning SLS and breathing for singing. The majority of the interviewees acknowledged that they learned about proper breathing from

their traditional training. Five out of seven singers said they thought very little about vowel modification but concentrated more on keeping the vowels as natural as possible. None of them spoke of maintaining speech level as a means to overcome trouble areas in the voice, which is what Riggs emphasizes time and again in his book.

SLS prides itself on the uniformity of the vocabulary used by its teachers and students as it pertains to voice training and communicating the concepts of SLS (chapter 4). SLS Level 4 instructor Virginia Norwood does the best job of using the standard vocabulary of SLS, but she's the only one. Everyone else speaks from the eclectic languages of their individual experiences with both traditional and SLS training.

Overall, all the singers said that using SLS had indeed helped to improve their vocal technique. However, most acknowledged that they use a hybrid approach, blending the concepts of SLS with other forms of voice training. Most said they would recommend SLS to other singers, but usually with the disclaimer that the technique needed to be modified.

When asked if they would have started off their vocal training studying SLS instead of a more traditional style, four said yes. Of the three singers who said no, two sing and work in more popular genres of music (Wes Hampton and Brett Manning). None of the singers interviewed started their training in SLS. They all began in more traditional training.

Chapter 3: In-Depth Look At SLS

The mantra, the focus, and the trademark of SLS is the position of the larynx as it pertains to speaking. Riggs's approach is centered on the idea that communication of the text is more important than secondary emphases such as technique. Therefore, the goal of SLS is to remove any obstacle that prevents one from singing in such a way that is manipulated and modified from how one naturally communicates. He mentions the outer muscles (any muscle outside those in the larynx) as the culprits of a distorted vocal production. The jaw, the tongue, and the soft and hard palates, all of which are usually fixated on at one time or another during one's vocal training, hinder one's ability to communicate freely during singing. Since we do not typically speak in a manner in which these muscles are engaged in an exaggerated way, why do some people sing that way? Riggs believes that one should not. However he is quick to point out that SLS doesn't automatically mean to "sing as you speak."

When you talk, you only use a limited pitch and dynamic range of tones, so it doesn't require a great deal of cord tension to create those tones. In order to meet your needs for the higher pitch and greater dynamic levels often required in singing, however, your vocal cords must be able to achieve greater degrees of tension... Increased cord tension is what enables your cords to hold back that extra bit of air pressure before they finally blow open, when you need to sing louder.

If your vocal cords and the other muscles in your larynx are unable to provide the required tension themselves, you can be sure that your outer muscles will volunteer their help. But that's the kind of help you don't want! *Any* outer muscle participation in the vibration process will only cause you vocal problems by pulling you off your speech level.¹

¹ Riggs, 34.

In the previous chapter, American voice teacher David Jones was highlighted as a critic of the SLS method. Here is a point on which Riggs and Jones actually agree. When a person talks, he/she usually stays within a limited pitch and dynamic range. It does not require much cord tension or, as Jones emphasizes, much acoustic space in the vocal tract. However when one sings, as Riggs was quoted earlier, the more extreme pitch and dynamic level causes the vocal cords to become more tense. In this case, the word tension does not have a negative connotation. That increased tension has to be there.

Riggs offers that one can sing relying on the muscles of the larynx and the vocal cords themselves to control the extra pressure and/or tension brought on by singing. The tendency for most singers is to engage the outer muscles to assist one's singing. As pointed out previously, Riggs discourages singers to rely on outside help from these muscles.

Achieving Speech Level

Up to this point SLS has been defined only. As in any performance based art, it is nearly impossible to fully understand it simply by reading about it. How does one actually achieve finding his/her speech level position? Riggs offers exercises in his book *Singing For The Stars* as well as the accompanying CD to help clarify what singing at speech level is. As stated earlier, the key to singing at one's speech level is to sing with one's larynx in a median position without the interference of the outer muscles.

You don't control your voice directly by working or thinking about breath support, vocal cord adjustments, or resonance. These things are all byproducts of Speech Level Singing. They happen automatically when you condition your larynx not to move by relaxing your outer muscles and

by allowing your vocal cords to thin and then shorten for higher notes to insure that your outer muscles stay relaxed.²

The word condition implies a training process in which one behavior is unlearned while another is learned in its place. That's exactly the route Riggs takes in the exercises he prescribes to help one develop the muscle coordination (or un-coordination) needed to sing at speech level. "Therefore, the first step in training in the speech level technique is to condition one's vocal cords to adjust through the use of airflow without the interference from the outer muscles"³

Sometimes the best way to learn how to do something is to learn how *not* to do something. That is the approach Riggs takes in assisting one in learning how to maintain a speech level position of the larynx during singing. The first exercise actually encourages the student to allow the outer muscles to raise the larynx. Singing with the larynx in a higher position helps the student to feel the awkward sensation of singing this way. Riggs warns the student not to get locked into singing in this manner. Once one feels how the incorrect technique affects the voice, he or she is to drop the exercise and move on to the other extreme.

The other extreme is singing while depressing one's larynx to a lower position than that of speech level. Again Riggs prescribes exercises that engage the outer muscles to push the larynx down into a depressed position. Again, in using the discomfort of the exaggerated position, one can feel the muscles engaging to maintain this depression of the larynx. Once the student understands the sensations of singing with a depressed

² Riggs, 39.

³ Riggs, 39.

larynx, he or she is encouraged to stop using this exercise, again, in order that he or she will not get locked into singing in this manner.

The final step is to find the middle ground. For this, Riggs gives the student exercises, which point him or her to singing at speech level. Speech level, according to Riggs, is the position of the larynx in which the outer muscles are released and the larynx assumes the stable, relaxed position found when one speaks comfortably. Once speech level is found, the challenge of maintaining it while singing actual songs becomes the student's focus. Thus, after the exercises for finding speech level are conquered, Riggs provides a final section in his book in which songs are introduced that can help find and keep speech level on a consistent basis.

Chapter 4: Teacher Certification

There are traditionally 2 ways in which teachers in the university and private studio systems become qualified to train other vocalists. The first is the artist with a distinguished, successful career as a performer (typically in opera or oratorio). The second is by climbing the ladder of academia: bachelor's, master's, and doctorate. There are those who are a mixture of both performer and academic, which most voice professors are to some extent. Regardless of the path taken to become a teacher of singing, the bulk of the training for the traditional voice teacher is in classical music (art song literature, opera, and oratorio). Some sort of success as a classical performer, whether on the professional or academic stage, is a must. The cliché “those who can’t, teach” is not true in the field of vocal pedagogy.

Conversely, success in classical music is not a prerequisite to being a teacher of Speech Level Singing; it can almost be a liability. Since a large percentage of the students seeking to learn SLS are aspiring pop singers, it stands to reason there would be some resistance to the influence of classical technique taught in most universities in the U.S. One need only read through the pages of *Singing For The Stars* to feel the disdain Riggs has for traditional vocal techniques of the establishment.¹

The teacher certification process for SLS is a complicated and expensive process. However, according to the *SLS Teacher Certification Manual* the potential for an SLS teacher to earn a lot of money is great.² Let us now explore the complex structure of the SLS Organization (Figure 2) as well as the SLS teacher certification process.

¹ Riggs, 81-82.

² Seth Riggs, *SLS Become Certified Manual* (Los Angeles: Speech Level Singing International, 2008), 3.

- To certify and license qualified SLS instructors.
- To license universities and other teaching organizations to officially use and promote the SLS teaching method.
- To promote and expand the SLS and Seth Riggs worldwide organization.
- To provide additional opportunities for instructors and students.
- To create paths for talented instructors and students to realize their full potential by connecting the voice education network to the entertainment industry.
- To create synergies between SLS members around the world.
- To create a forum to exchange ideas on teaching SLS.
- To give people the opportunity to train and enhance their voice for everyday conversation, public speaking, and to become the best professional singers.

Figure 2: Objectives of the SLS Organization

Riggs, *SLS Become Certified Manual* (Los Angeles: Speech Level Singing International, 2008), 3.

SLS Organization Summary

The SLS Organization was created by Seth Riggs in order to protect the SLS trademark, teachers and students worldwide.³ Everything done within the organization is to adequately communicate Riggs’s ideas on teaching. The purpose of the certification process is to make sure each teacher within the organization fully understands SLS and how to relay those ideas to the student. According to the manual, although each teacher has his or her own personal style of teaching, “there are certain absolutes in Speech Level Singing to which its teachers will be held accountable.”⁴ The organization guarantees its

³ Riggs, 4.

⁴ Riggs, 4.

students that their instructors will have both a clear understanding and correct execution of Speech Level Singing. This unique system for vocal training goes to great lengths to make the system of SLS training as uniform as possible worldwide. As stated earlier, one of the most interesting aspects of the certification process is the accountability of the teachers to communicate the concepts of SLS authentically and proficiently. Therefore, Seth Riggs created the organizational structure that is Speech Level Singing International.

Speech Level Singing International is a very well organized hierarchy of associates. Seth Riggs is, of course, the head, but the organization below him is an intricate collection of voice teachers, businessmen and women, financial experts, clerical positions, marketing executives, and a myriad of advisors. Each group has a specific function, with the cumulative goal of maintaining the technical and commercial uniformity of SLS.

Instructor Management Team

The highest ranking team in the organizational hierarchy of SLS International is the Instructor Management Team (IMT). The IMT is made up of voice teachers from around the world. They are handpicked by Seth Riggs and have access to him as their personal voice instructor. They assist Riggs worldwide in overseeing the SLS organization and its teachers. The IMT maintains ongoing education of the SLS teachers throughout the world. The IMT do not work for SLS International. They are independent voice teachers who maintain Level 5 certification (levels of certification will be addressed later) within the SLS organization. The IMT is comprised of two groups: Instructor Developers (ID) and Instructor Evaluators (IE). Each group has specific duties in the development and continued training of the SLS instructors all over the world.

Instructor Developer

Instructor Developers (ID) are in charge of educating the aspiring SLS instructors for what the Instructor Evaluators (a notch higher in the hierarchy, to be discussed next) will be expecting of them. This includes: SLS vocabulary, basic SLS techniques, and the various exercises needed for teaching. Each certification process (Levels #1-5) takes 8 hours of instruction for each teacher. Of the 8 hours required per year for certification, 5 of these hours are spent with the ID in preparation for the IE. In fact, 5 hours with an ID is considered minimal. Most future teachers will need to do more than that to pass the Instructor Evaluator's standards.

Instructor Evaluator

Instructor Evaluators (IE) are responsible for the testing of SLS instructors. They have the power to pass or fail instructors based on the instructor's knowledge of the language and application of the SLS technique. Each instructor has to spend a minimum of 3 hours with an IE per year. An IE can also function as an ID, but the instructor cannot spend the final 3 hours of their certification with the same IE/ID combination. He/she must choose another IE for the final testing portion of the certification process.

The Education Advisory Group

The immediate contacts for the SLS instructors to the SLS Organizational Network are the Education Advisory Group (EAG). The EAG is broken into regions worldwide (Figure 3). Their responsibility is to make sure all the instructors in the Network are getting the attention they need in order to excel in the program (Figure 4). It's all a part of how the SLS Organization stays connected from top to bottom.

United States

Northern California
San Jose, Ca
Los Angeles, Ca
San Diego, Ca
Northeast, US
Northwest, US
Southeast, US
Southwest, US
Utah
Texas
Nevada

Daniel Jackson
Lorna Goodwin
Valerie Morehouse
Guy Babusek
Ryan Luchuck
Spencer Welch
Tricia Grey
Maryanne Krueger
Anjie Mickelsen
Jay Lemon
Kimberly Kanitz

Europe

Europe
UK (London)
UK (LIPA)
UK (Manchester & Western Europe)
Ireland

Agata Pisko
Line Hilton
Lisa Hauptert
Heather Baker
Andres Martorell

Asia Pacific

Southern Asia
Northern Asia
Japan
Northern Australia
Southern Australia

Daniel Singh
Ted Cho
Hiroki Sakurada
Sharon Rowntree
Lisa Perks

Regions At Large

For regions not covered above

Claire Yarrington

Point EAG

Point EAG (Head of EAG)

Spencer Welch

Figure 3: EAG Members

Riggs, *SLS Become Certified Manual* (Los Angeles: Speech Level Singing International, 2008), 9.

- Commit up to 5 hours a week to being available to the teachers in their region
- Communicate with all the teachers (pre-certified and certified) in their geographic area on a regular basis
- Report to the EAG directors on a regular basis
- Innovate educational ideas in their area throughout the year, of which they will become a profit sharing partner (any innovation developed under the banner of SLS is property of the company)
- Coordinate two Instructor Management Team (IMT) events in their region per year

Figure 4: Responsibilities of the EAG

Seth Riggs, *SLS Become Certified Manual* (Los Angeles: Speech Level Singing International, 2008), 8.

Besides becoming certified with the SLS organization, instructors who have completed their levels of testing gain access to the SLS Network. Certified teachers can use the SLS Network in a variety of ways. Through the Network, certified teachers have access to medical vocal rehabilitation if the need arises. Also, the Network can help a gifted student get connected with management, lawyers, co-writers, or even a recording contract with a record label.⁵ The prospect of being able to get professional connections not only helps the SLS teacher, but also entices students whose ultimate goal is to have a successful, lucrative career in music.

The Certification Process

The first step to becoming a certified SLS instructor is to become pre-certified. It's a very simple process of going to the SLS website, www.speechlevelsinging.com, and filling out a teacher profile form. After making his or her desire to further learn about SLS known, the aspiring teacher must contact the EAG member that represents his

⁵ Riggs, 7.

or her region. It is the duty of the EAG member to guide the new teacher into the certification process. The qualifications for becoming a certified SLS instructor are as follows (Figure 5):

- Be at least 18 years old
- Fill out the teacher profile found on the SLS website, www.speechlevelsinging.com, and print off a copy
- Fill out the SLS Instructor Contract found on the back of the SLS manual and send it in to the SLS headquarters in Los Angeles.
- Send both of these forms to SLS with an administration fee of \$300.

Figure 5: Qualifications for becoming a certified SLS instructor.

Seth Riggs, *SLS Become Certified Manual* (Los Angeles: Speech Level Singing International, 2008), 17.

Once the appropriate documents and fees have been received by SLS International, the teacher will receive a login name and password in order to access the secure teacher section of www.speechlevelsinging.com. Here's where the process begins to get tricky.

An aspiring teacher can remain in the beginning stages of certification (pre-certified) for a maximum of 3 years. When the pre-certified teacher finally decides he or she does indeed want to become certified, he or she must complete all the Level 1 certification requirements in a 12 month period. If a pre-certified teacher does not complete the 12 month SLS certification for Level 1 within the 3 year limit, the teacher will be removed from the program and must re-apply (paperwork and fees) at a later

time.⁶ While the teacher is in pre-certification status, there is no license agreement with SLS. This means the teachers cannot use the name SLS, Speech Level Singing, or Seth Riggs in promoting their private studios or classes. Once one is certified (Level 1) then he or she can use the SLS affiliated verbiage to market his or her studio and teaching. However, a teacher in pre-certification can tell people that he or she is in training to become an SLS certified instructor.⁷

Once an instructor enters into the pre-certification program, he or she has access to SLS formal teacher training classes and conferences, access to the private area of the SLS website, and access to the online discussion forums therein. Access to the online resources of SLS is pivotal to the development of an SLS instructor, since the network encompasses other instructors and colleagues worldwide. This resource offers many avenues of growth and connection for anyone in the SLS organization.

In addition to the networking advantages of having online access to the private areas of speechlevelsinging.com, the pre-certified instructors are also able to log all the hours and training they have received counting toward SLS certification online.

To advance from pre-certification to Level 1, the instructors in training must fulfill the following during a twelve-month period:

- Be at least 18 years old.
- A minimum of 5 hours of private study with an Instructor Developer.
- One hour of testing from an Instructor Evaluator.

⁶ Riggs, 18.

⁷ Riggs, 18.

- 5 points – Points are received by attending a Seth Riggs or another IMT’s master classes, watching an IMT or Riggs teach privately, or watching approved videos of the SLS technique.
- Pass testing while teaching two lessons as an IE observes.
- Pass testing while observing an IE teaching 2 of his/her students.
- Pass the SLS Level 1 testing.

Figure 6: Advancing from Pre-certification to Level 1.

Seth Riggs, *SLS Become Certified Manual* (Los Angeles: Speech Level Singing International, 2008), 19.

As previously mentioned, the pre-certified instructors are responsible for logging all of their required hours and points on the SLS website. The pre-certified instructors cannot log a lesson more than one month old. Once the requirements have been reached, upon the approval from the IMT, the pre-certified instructor will advance to Level 1. At this point, the instructor can begin using the SLS brand and language to promote his/her studio and teaching.

Certification Levels: Level 1

To become a Level 1 certified teacher of SLS, one must complete the pre-certification program and pass the Level 1 test. As previously mentioned, Level 1 teachers are allowed to use the Seth Riggs name and the term Speech Level Singing to advertise their private studio and teaching method. Level 1 instructors are not permitted to present public master classes, lectures, or any other types of public displays of the SLS technique. All SLS teachers remain at Level 1 for two calendar years. In order to maintain Level 1 status, a teacher has to continue his or her education of Speech Level Singing by completing 5 hours of private study with an Instructor Developer (ID), one hour of testing with an Instructor Evaluator (IE) in which the Level 1 teacher receives 5

points. They must also teach two students themselves while an IE observes for two separate half hours (equaling one hour). In turn, the teacher must watch an IE teach two of his or her own students for two separate half hours (equaling one hour). All of this must be done in each of the two years that the teacher in training is at Level 1.

Levels 2 & 3

Levels 2 and 3 are, for the most part, identical. At both levels, an instructor in training can teach master classes, workshops, or any other public display of SLS.

However, any of these types of events must be approved by SLS directors. Just as in Level 1, teachers at Levels 2 and 3 must continue their SLS education by completing 5 hours of private study with an ID, a one hour one-on-one test lesson with an IE (two half hour sessions), receiving 5 points, and teaching 2 students while an IE is observing (two half hour sessions). In turn, the instructor in training must observe as an IE teaches 2 of his or her students at some point during each year of the Level 2 and 3 certification periods. Each level takes 2 years to complete. After a total of 4 years at Levels 2 and 3, the instructor in training can then advance to Level 4.

Level 4

Just as in the previous levels, the Level 4 instructor is allowed to teach master classes and public workshops, as approved by the SLS directors. Level 4 teachers must continue their education advancing to Level 5 by completing all of the requirements of the previous 3 levels. At Level 4, instructors are eligible to serve on the Instructor Management Team (IMT), meaning they can become an ID or IE. Also at Level 4, the instructors must pass panel testing, that is, teaching before the IMT. The panel test is held at the end of each year.

Level 5

The final level for an SLS instructor is Level 5. After completion of Level 4, the teacher will remain at this level of certification (Level 5). The level 5 teacher also has to continue his/her education, however. Level 5 instructors must go through all of the training of the previous levels for a two year period. Level 5 teachers can lead master classes and any other public clinics displaying the SLS technique. Even Level 5 instructors have to have their events approved by the SLS directors. Level 5 instructors are also eligible to become members of the IMT. It is very important at this point for the teacher to have a solid business structure in place for his or her private studio. At Level 5, teachers can set up studios that employ multiple SLS instructors and coaches. Level 5 teachers have priority access to Seth Riggs himself as a consultant for teaching and as a teacher for their own personal vocal technique. Just as at Level 4, Level 5 instructors must pass panel testing in which they teach in front of the IMT. These tests are held at the end of each year of the Level 5 certification period.

Points

During each level of certification, teachers must earn a total of 5 points in conjunction with their education. Points break down as follows:

- Attending master classes conducted by Seth Riggs or an IMT member (2 points).
- Observing voice lessons taught by Seth Riggs or an IMT member (a block of 3 hours observing Riggs teaching is worth 2 points; a block of 3 hours observing an IMT member teaching is worth 1 point).
- Viewing website videos of Seth Riggs teaching (1 point for every 90 minutes of footage).
- 1 point is given for each 5 hours of study with a certified SLS instructor. The teacher must be at least one level above the instructor studying. For example, a Level 2 instructor can earn points by studying with a Level 3 instructor.

However, a Level 2 instructor would earn no points by studying with another Level 2 instructor. Instructors seeking further certification can earn up to 3 points a year by studying with a higher leveled teacher.

- All other avenues of scoring points are up to the discretion of Seth Riggs. He can award points to an instructor based on what he deems as beneficial in their training.

Figure 7: SLS Instructor Training Points.

Seth Riggs, *SLS Become Certified Manual* (Los Angeles: Speech Level Singing International, 2008), 27.

Telephone and Internet Lessons

A unique aspect to SLS is the option to have voice lessons via the internet or the telephone. The preference, of course, is for a student to study with a certified SLS teacher face to face. However, if this is not possible (due to lack of proximity to an SLS teacher), telephone and internet lessons are permitted. A student can only have an internet or telephone lesson with a Level 3 instructor or higher. The student needs to have at least one lesson in person with the desired instructor before pursuing the internet or telephone option. If the Level 3 instructor (or higher) wants to give internet or telephone lessons, he or she must first show that they are proficient in this area by teaching an internet or telephone lesson in front of an IMT member. If approved, the teacher becomes internet/telephone certified.

The Cost of Studying and Becoming Certified in SLS

Studying and becoming certified in Speech Level Singing is an expensive undertaking. However, the business opportunities for both performer and instructor can be great (Figure 8).

Lesson Fees

- A lesson with Seth Riggs - \$400/hr
- A lesson with an IMT member - \$150/hr
- All other certified teachers charge at their individual discretion.

Certification License Fees*

- Pre-certification - \$300 Administration fee
- Level 1 - \$600/year
- Level 2 - \$750/year
- Level 3 - \$900/year
- Level 4 - \$1050/year
- Level 5 - \$1200/year

*Pre-certification is a onetime fee. Levels 1-4 are for two years each. Fees for Level 5 continue each year as long as the instructor wishes to be licensed.

Figure 8: The Cost of SLS Training.

Seth Riggs, *SLS Become Certified Manual* (Los Angeles: Speech Level Singing International, 2008), 30.

Chapter 5: Comparisons

Richard Miller

Over the past few decades, the name Richard Miller has been synonymous with American vocal pedagogy. His most famous book on the subject *The Structure of Singing* is frequently used as the textbook for vocal pedagogy courses in universities and conservatories throughout the United States.¹ There are two major focuses of his approach to teaching one how to sing: the scientific method and the Italian philosophy of *appoggio* (at least how Miller interprets it).

Miller was a pioneer in the realm of science and how it relates to singing. So, much of his previously mentioned book deals with the anatomy and physiology of singing and how the sounds can be measured scientifically. In 1989, Richard Miller founded the Otto B. Schoepfle Vocal Arts Center (OBSVAC) which is an actual laboratory environment in which singers can study and approach the art of singing from the standpoint of scientific measurable analyses.²

The second approach that Miller endorses and encourages is the Italian technique of *appoggio*. *Appoggio* is a system for combining and balancing muscles and organs of the trunk and neck, controlling their relationships to the supra-glottal resonators, so that no exaggerated function of any one of them upsets the whole.”³

¹ Richard Miller, *The Structure of Singing: System and Art in Vocal Technique* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Group, 1996).

² Lorraine Manz, “Otto B. Schoepfle Vocal Arts Center,” <http://new.oberlin.edu/conservatory/departments/voice/vocal-arts-center/> (2011), accessed 26 July 2011.

³ Miller, 23.

The Scientific Method

In the scope of singing, the scientific method is still a relatively new approach. Miller's role in the creation of OBSVAC at Oberlin Conservatory was a huge development in the field of voice science. The research at OBSVAC allowed students to use measurable, scientific data in their pursuit of becoming better singing artists.

Although the traditional language of imagery is useful in the teaching of singing, the singing voice is a physical and acoustical instrument that depends on the coordination of vocal fold vibration, airflow, and resonance factors... Specificity of communicable language is increased through visual and auditory feedback; the singer is thereby able to overcome technique problems more quickly, arriving sooner at effective artistic expression.⁴

All of Miller's books have a healthy dose of voice science intermingled with his own opinions of how science meshes with the older Italian concepts of voice training. In *The Structure of Singing*, Miller talks about measuring acoustical spectrums, vibrations in relation to vowel modifications, rates of vibrato, the production of speech versus singing, etc. The most interesting observation, which relates to Seth Riggs's mantra for singing, is the use of the larynx. At OBSVAC, the researchers are able to measure the degrees of freedom at the laryngeal level in which students are encouraged to sing with a breathy, pressed, then normal phonation.⁵ Through the use of a spectrograph the student can see the effects these different types of phonation have on the freeness of sound produced. This is very similar to how Riggs advises his students and readers to find their speech level.

⁴ Manz, 1.

⁵ Manz, 1.

Although Seth Riggs holds Miller in high regard, he doesn't have a high regard for voice science.⁶

Of course your voice works, as does everything else, according to scientific principles. But those principles can be abused by those who aren't able to apply them. Prominent voice "scientists" have attempted for years to translate scientific findings into useable vocal technique. They have made some remarkable observations as to what happens to voices during the process of singing. But that's all they are – *observations*.⁷

Miller does not, however, put "all of his eggs" in the basket of voice science. Even though the physical, scientifically observed functions of singing are fact, they have little to do with actual singing. "It is doubtful that reading about the cricoarytenoids and the thyroarytenoids has ever proved very decisive in the development of any singing artist."⁸ Scientific observations and analyses are beneficial as in the different tests done at the OBSVAC. For example, analyzing the acoustic spectrums of a vowel as a singer sings into the spectrograph can help the singer correlate the feeling of singing with the visual aid of the frequency waves on the screen. That's an added bonus that did not exist in vocal pedagogy before the field of voice science existed.

Richard Miller and Appoggio

As mentioned previously, Miller approaches teaching from two vantage points: the scientific method and the traditions of the international Italian School. Where Riggs peels back the layers of voice study to focus totally on a laryngeal position, Miller

⁶ Riggs, 8.

⁷ Riggs, 79.

⁸ Miller, xx.

attributes the Italian technique of *appoggio* as being the ideal way to approach singing and its teaching.

For English speakers, the term *appoggio* has been narrowly defined and translated as support. That, unfortunately, leads many singers to focus on some function of the muscles of the abdomen and to a lesser extent, the back. Subsequently, it also leads to a neglect of resonance factors and a balance of breath management. However, according to Miller, *appoggio* is an all-inclusive word. “The historic Italian school did not separate the motor and the resonance facets of phonation as have some other pedagogies.”⁹

To Miller, the technique of *appoggio* is what leads to the ideal vocalism. *Appoggio* is initiated by how one takes and manages a breath for singing. The concentration on breathing that *appoggio* requires is a little off-putting to Riggs (as has been noted).¹⁰ For Richard Miller, however, breathing is paramount to healthy singing. “Silent inspiration is the hallmark of *appoggio*.”¹¹ If a sound can be heard while one inhales, that indicates tension before the singer even phonates. Therefore, the breath for singing must be inaudible.

How do all the components come together in the *appoggio* technique to help the singer produce a healthy and aesthetically pleasing sound? Miller offers a concise, practical description:

In *appoggio* technique, the sternum must initially find a moderately high position; this position is then retained throughout the inspiration-expiration cycle.

⁹ Miller, 23.

¹⁰ Riggs, 78.

¹¹ Miller, 29.

Shoulders are relaxed, but the sternum never slumps. Because the ribs are attached to the sternum, sternal posture in part determines diaphragmatic position. If the sternum lowers, the ribs cannot maintain an expanded position, and the diaphragm must ascend more rapidly. Both the epigastric and umbilical regions should be stabilized so that a feeling of internal-external balance is present. This sensation directly influences the diaphragm... Balance of muscular action is felt both in the frontal regions (thoracic, epigastric and umbilical) and in the lateral posterior (also lumbardorsal) areas.¹²

Miller believes that most problems in singing can be linked back to breath and breath management. Even the problem of laryngeal instability, which is Riggs' major concern, can be corrected by breathing, according to Miller.¹³ With all the emphasis Miller puts on breathing, it is striking how nonchalant Riggs is on the subject. As stated earlier, Riggs sees correct breath management as a result of good technique, not the cause. So, it stands to reason that Seth Riggs's philosophy on correct vocal technique must classify breathing as secondary as long as he teaches that speech level positioning of the larynx as paramount.

Oren Brown

Oren Brown was a well respected pioneer in the arena of vocal pedagogy. His teaching career spanned more than fifty years. He gave his last master class in 2003 at the age of 94. His contributions to the discipline of vocal rehabilitation and voice science have been well documented in voice journals and in his own book, *Discover Your Voice: How to Develop Healthy Voice Habits*, first published in 1996.

¹² Miller, 24-25.

¹³ Richard Miller, *Training Tenor Voices* (Schirmer Books, 1993), 37.

He was professor of voice at such prestigious institutions as the Mannes College of Music and the Juilliard School as well as maintaining an international private studio. He had many students with distinguished careers, most notably the American tenor James King. Brown's success as a pedagogue, researcher, and author make his perspective on voice training invaluable as a source for this document. As will be seen, Brown and Riggs agree on a lot, which would seem to legitimize, somewhat, Riggs' view on vocal training.

Primal Sound

To Brown, the key to developing a healthy vocal technique is for the singer to find and develop his/her primal sound. What is a primal sound? Brown defines it as the natural sound a person makes while expressing spontaneous emotion. "Primal sounds are involuntary. They are sounds you were born with."¹⁴ These are the sounds one makes when one cries, is startled, hurt or disappointed.

How does one find his/her primal sound? Brown offers some very simple examples that most people do every day without thinking.

As a starter, just say "huh" [hə], as if reacting in surprise to an astonishing statement. Now try "uh huh" [əhə], as in an expression of agreement. Next try "huh huh" [həhə], as in a laugh... The sound people make when they don't know what they want to say is a prolonged "uh" [ə].¹⁵

Brown contends that one can take these sounds and mould them into useable tones for singing. Much like Riggs's philosophy of speech level laryngeal position, Oren

¹⁴ Oren L. Brown, *Discover Your Voice: How to Develop Healthy Voice Habits* (Singular Publishing Group LTD., 1996), 1.

¹⁵ Brown, 6.

Brown believes that by learning to consistently maintain one's primal sound, a singer or speaker can overcome most of the obstacles of vocal technique. "If you locate your primal sound, you are on your way to realizing your full potential as an artist."¹⁶

Of the authors and teachers discussed in this document, no other seems to line up more with Riggs than Oren Brown. Brown believes one must develop a healthy speaking voice in order to develop a healthy singing voice. This concept is not limited to Brown or Riggs. Many studies have been done to find the correlation between speaking and singing. In fact, all of the authors spotlighted in this paper have mentioned the importance of healthy speech habits in terms of how they affect singing. However, Brown talks about it in terms of the previously mentioned primal sound. The way Brown explains how primal sound and correct speech affect the singing voice sounds very similar to how Riggs explains finding one's speech level. Brown writes, "The essence of [good] vocal technique is to perform with the greatest freedom and the least effort."¹⁷ To Brown, that can be achieved by cultivating one's primal sound.

The Larynx

Brown's philosophy on laryngeal function is nearly identical to Riggs's.

Your larynx is suspended freely in your throat.
Good vocal production depends on keeping the surrounding
muscles (the outer muscles as Riggs calls them) free from
strain as possible... Any undue pull from the outside will
throw the inner adjustments out of balance.¹⁸

¹⁶ Brown, 7.

¹⁷ Brown, 9.

¹⁸ Brown, 9.

Breathing

Brown and Riggs also share a somewhat passive approach to breath management. Instead of actively pursuing sensations of breath support, Brown contends that those sensations will come the more a singer uses his/her voice. Sensations in the abdomen, lower back, buttocks, and thighs should eventually occur automatically, according to Brown. “Don’t try for it. You will find it happening when the right time comes.”¹⁹

According to Brown, finding a balance in the use of breath and the control of tone production comes through the conditioning of the laryngeal muscles. This heavily endorses Riggs’s writings on vocal technique. Brown believes that proper breath management is the result of proper laryngeal training, not vice versa.

Could one’s primal sound and what Riggs refers to as speech level be the same thing? The description of how the two are achieved and cultivated into a viable technique is very similar. Oren Brown spent 72 years teaching and observing the human voice from a musical, technical, and clinical standpoint. The fact that Riggs’s SLS has many similar aspects (at least in theory) can lead to a couple of conclusions. As stated earlier, it somewhat legitimizes SLS as a sound approach to singing. Secondly, it could also mean that Riggs’s approach is not anything new per se, but a repackaging and modern-day marketing of an American style of vocal development that has been used by other teachers for decades.

David Jones

David Jones has already been highlighted as a critic of SLS. Being so outspoken against SLS warrants the question: what does Jones teach as the most efficient way to

¹⁹ Brown, 35.

sing? Riggs, Miller, and Brown all seem to have one focal point each on which their philosophies are based. That is not the case with Jones.

Jones carries the banner of the “Swedish-Italian School” which seems to be a hybrid of the old Italian method that is commonly taught in the U.S. mixed with some aspects of what the Swedish find aesthetically pleasing. It’s a somewhat complicated approach that includes seven aspects that work together simultaneously. Simplicity is not something that Jones seems too concerned with.

Jones’s philosophies on vocal technique permeate his many articles on his website and in periodicals such as *Classical Singer*. Breathing for singing includes expansion of the lower abs as well as the lumbar muscles of the lower back. For support, Jones teaches his version of *appoggio* which is a slight leaning of the body with the hip sockets bent as well as the knees.

The next few aspects deal with the vocal tract and use of the articulators. In the method Jones teaches, mouth position plays a huge role. The ideal position of the mouth is a small oval shape. This shape is maintained as much as possible throughout one’s range. The jaw is positioned slightly down and back, which is supposed to aid in keeping the larynx low. The tongue is to maintain a high, arched position as when one is making the phoneme “ng” [ŋ]. This aids in keeping the sound forward and in keeping nasal resonance present in one’s tone. The use of nasal resonance (allowing a small flow of air to escape through the nose while singing) is encouraged in Jones’s method. In the midst of all this, the soft palate is supposed to be lifted high and wide.

After much practice and training, all of these techniques should result in a completely balanced use of the voice. It’s really no surprise after reading all the actions

that must simultaneously be maintained in singing this way, that Jones would find great fault with Riggs's method. Riggs proposes basically one thing, speech level laryngeal position, which is supposed to cause many other positive aspects of singing to occur. Jones proposes a seemingly much more involved balancing act, which leaves little to chance. Again, to Riggs healthy singing is a result of SLS, not caused by too much thinking. Jones's approach devotes much more to the causes of healthy singing.

Chapter 6: Conclusions

What can be gleaned from this extensive comparison of SLS to more traditional methods of vocal training? It is nearly impossible to come to the conclusion that one approach is superior to another due to the subjectivity of vocal training and the individual goals of a singer. What works for one singer might not work for another. That being said, there are some concrete conclusions that can be drawn from the comparison of SLS to more traditional methods of teaching.

Amplification

It is a pretty broad claim that one can perform any type of musical style or genre by simply utilizing the techniques taught in Speech Level Singing. Different types of vocal music have differing demands on the voice. By the vast endorsements of pop artists, it is clear that SLS is more widely used in popular music genres. Due to the fact that most pop songs stick to a limited range and the message of the lyrics is much more important than vocal acrobatics, it is no wonder that a more speech related approach is favorable to artists seeking to express themselves in this manner. Pop artists also have the advantage of performing using electronic amplification (microphones) which helps them to be heard and understood without putting too much demand on the voice. That is usually not the case for classical artists.

Classical artists are given the task of singing music that demands the extremes of one's range be utilized in public performance (especially sopranos and tenors). Typically they are singing in large performance halls over orchestral accompaniment with no artificial amplification. Simply telling a classical singer to maintain his or her speech level under such circumstances seems like a daunting task. The biggest reasons why

teachers like David Jones and Richard Miller spend so much time on the various aspects of vocal technique (support or *appoggio*, breath management, resonance factors, posture, etc.) is because of the athletic demands of singing with no amplification. Singing over a full orchestra demands a singer have the ability to project his or her voice in order to be heard and understood clearly by the audience. This takes concentration and the engagement of the singer's entire body to be used as the vocal instrument. If a singer is not trained in a manner in which he or she is made aware of all the intricacies of singing and being heard without the aid of amplification, it could be detrimental to his or her career (as a classical artist).

The issue of amplification is a concept that Riggs seems to neglect. No doubt SLS has its merits as can be seen in the literature highlighted in the previous chapters and in the interviews by singers who have studied the technique. As stated in chapter two, however, even the singers interviewed for this document modify SLS in order to sing classical music.

The Appeal of SLS

One of the appealing selling points of the SLS technique could be its relative newness. The status quo of traditional vocal pedagogy has been established for better than 200 years. With its promises of great versatility and sophisticated marketing, SLS would surely appeal to a young, aspiring singer ready to embark on a career in music (especially popular music). Conservatory and university training has done a relatively good job of being exclusive. If repertoire does not fall between c. 1600-1911, oftentimes it is considered out of the realm of acceptable music for study. Seth Riggs views almost

any genre of music as acceptable, appropriate repertoire for study and performance. This fact has to have a huge influence on students not interested in pursuing a career in classical music.

It is not entirely fair to fault the conservatory and university systems for their restrictions on repertoire. Most schools operate under some form of accreditation such as the National Association of Schools of Music (NASM). Such organizations set certain standards and criteria that must be met in order to maintain that accreditation. Within these standards most institutions (and the vocal arts divisions) develop acceptable repertoire restrictions in order to develop and graduate well rounded artists. A well rounded education usually entails repertoire from the Baroque, Classical, Romantic, Twentieth Century, and some contemporary music. However, the bulk of the repertoire studied and performed for a serious vocalist is from the Romantic period and earlier. Unless the institution has a major in music business or another modern day focus, popular music is not held as equal to the music of the 17th-19th centuries; not so with SLS. Not only does SLS use popular genres of music as acceptable repertoire, they are encouraged.

Frustrations can arise when a young student is only given the option to cultivate a classical technique when his or her goal is not to become a classical artist. That is where SLS finds a place in the arena of vocal pedagogy. SLS offers versatility that is not confined to a specific genre. Although there is no guarantee of success, the prospect Riggs offers of singing whatever music moves a singer and doing it well is likely enticing to an aspiring artist.

SLS A Scam?

Due to the sophisticated organization of the SLS corporation and the cost of studying as well as becoming certified to teach SLS, it could be viewed as a scam or a money making racket. Certainly David Jones has deemed SLS to be vocal abuse. An argument could be made by traditionalists that SLS is too good to be true, especially for how much it costs to complete the training. However, is it so different from the costs of an academic degree or the costs of a private teacher and coach in New York? There is always a two-pronged aspect to the training of the singing artist: the integrity of the art form and the funds to keep it going.

Final Conclusion

Any vocal technique will have critics and advocates. One person can praise a teacher as the savior of his or her voice, while another can be so distraught over the studio practices of the same teacher that they threaten a lawsuit. Some teachers build their entire career on the success of one student. Again, it is so subjective. Depending on the singer's background and current situation a teacher could offer the perfect advice to help that person have a break through. Conversely, using the same criteria, a teacher could offer the same advice to a different student and the result simply be confusion. No doubt there are certain standards that must be maintained in academia. However, in the realm of private instruction by teachers and students with no affiliation to a school, almost anything (style, repertoire, and certain techniques) is fair game. If a technique helps singers more easily reach the goals they have set as an artist, then it has achieved its purpose. Speech Level Singing is not for everyone. It clearly has had a larger impact in the realm of popular music. If an artist aspires to have a career as a popular singer, then

Speech Level Singing might be the best route to take. For a singer desiring a career in classical music, SLS would probably work best in conjunction with traditional training.

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Appendix A

The following is the consent form for all the singers interviewed for this document:

Consent Document

My name is Josef McClellan. I am a doctoral candidate in the voice department of the Rudi E. Scheidt School of Music at the University of Memphis. I am currently writing my doctoral research document on the subject of Speech Level Singing (SLS). The premise of my paper is to compare/contrast SLS to the techniques commonly taught in conservatories and universities here in the U.S. I plan to compare the writings in Riggs' book on the SLS technique *Singing for the Stars* with the writings of some of the most well known authors on the subject of vocal pedagogy. As part of this comparative analysis I also would like interview some singers who have studied both the traditional techniques and SLS in order to get a first hand idea of how the two different styles translate to an actual performer. Since you have had experience in both classical training and SLS training, I would like permission to interview you on the subject and use the information gathered in my document.

I, _____, consent to be interviewed and allow Josef McClellan to use the information collected as material for his DMA document.

Appendix B

The following is the interview questionnaire emailed to all the singers interviewed for this document:

Speech Level Singing Technique: Interview –

1. In your opinion what would you say is the major difference between Speech Level Singing (SLS) and the traditional voice training you received in the university/private studio setting?
2. How has SLS improved your vocal performance?
3. Are there any challenges or “pit-falls” to singing using the SLS technique? What are they?
4. In your experience with SLS, what is your understanding/definition of “placement”?
5. In your experience with SLS training, what is your understanding/definition of breath support/breath management?
6. Do you use vowel modification in your singing? Why or why not?
7. Is there a certain exercise that helps you find your speech level position (laryngeal position) for when you sing? What is it (hard to write down, I know)?
8. From the perspective of SLS, how do you breathe for singing? (i.e...expanded rib cage; fill the back up with air; fill lower abs; fill up chest...etc.)
9. How is posture addressed in your experience with SLS?
10. Does position/shape of the mouth play any role in singing correctly?
11. Based on what you’ve been taught through SLS, how do you handle your breaks (passaggio points)?
12. What role do the lips play in singing? The nose? The jaw?
13. Would you recommend studying the SLS technique to all singers? Why or Why not?
14. Overall would you say that singing in this manner has brought you more success as a performer? Why or Why not?

15. How long did you study the SLS technique?
16. Do you currently study with an SLS teacher?
17. If you had it to do over again, would you have started off from the beginning training your voice in this manner (SLS) instead of going the traditional route of college/private, classical studios? Why or Why not?

Appendix C

International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) Basic Vowel Symbols:

<u>IPA</u>	<u>Example</u>
ɑ	Father
ɛ	Bed
i	See
o	No
u	Soon
ə	About